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DEPARTMENT PASS TO USAID AND OFDA

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SUBJECT: NORTHERN UGANDA NOTES (May 1-18, 2007)

¶1. (U) Summary: The following Northern Uganda Notes provides information on the situation on the ground and USG activities aimed at meeting Mission's objectives in northern Uganda. These objectives include promoting regional stability through peace and security, good governance, access to social services, economic growth, and humanitarian assistance. Post appreciates feedback from consumers on the utility of this product and any gaps in information that need to be filled. End Summary.

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PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PROCESSES  
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¶2. (U) Negotiations between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) resumed on April 26. Initial sessions were bogged down on the issue of allowances for the LRA delegates. The LRA requested face-to-face meetings with the GOU delegation to finalize agreement on Agenda Item Two: Comprehensive Solutions. After initially reviving demands for ministerial positions and control over development funds in northern Uganda, the LRA relented and agreed to sign a text that was a combination of provisions from the Ugandan Constitution and the Northern Uganda Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan (PRDP). Other issues were deferred to an "implementing protocol." The signed document was similar to what had been agreed in December 2006.

¶3. (U) The peace talks recessed on May 3 to allow the LRA delegates to travel to Rikwangba to consult with LRA leaders Joseph Kony and Vincent Otti. The resumption date for the talks has slipped from May 14 to May 31 to give the LRA more time to discuss the next agenda item, "justice and accountability."

¶4. (SBU) Donors continue to grapple with financial and accountability issues related to the Juba Initiative Fund. A streamlined approval process with specified regulations as to what can be paid has been developed by the donors and U.N. Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs. This will be administered by KPMG, an accounting firm. Meanwhile, the LRA continues to demand increased allowances and more frequent travel out of Juba. The Government of South Sudan requested that the secretariat staff be paid for out of the JIF, which the donors rejected. UNOCHA has prepared a document clearly stating the allowable expenses and process through which funds would be disbursed. Discussion of the allowances will be raised when the talks resume.

¶5. (SBU) USG Activities: Africa Bureau Deputy Assistant Secretary James Swan discussed the prospects for a peace agreement with GOU negotiators, parliamentarians, and military officials during his visit to Uganda from May 7-8. Government negotiators outlined a new

approach on the issues of justice and accountability, which will focus on teaching the LRA leaders about their judicial options, rather than focus on traditional reconciliation mechanisms. The GOU expressed its satisfaction with the level of support from the U.S. for the peace process. Northern parliamentarians raised the issue of the LRA's designation on terrorist lists and the International Criminal Court indictments as impediments to the peace process. They expressed disappointment with the LRA delegation's delaying tactics at the talks, and expressed concerns about the marginalization of non-Acholi districts in terms of humanitarian assistance. Military officials claim that the LRA is regrouping and rearming in Garamba National Park and described their efforts to work with Uganda's neighbors on joint operations.

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SECURITY UPDATE  
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¶6. (U) The Ugandan Peoples' Defense Forces (UPDF) and Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) gave the LRA the approved corridors for assembly of LRA forces from Owiny Kibul area to Rikwangba on May 18. After Kony and Otti give their approval of the routes, the LRA forces in that area will have seven days to assemble at Rikwangba. LRA members in other parts of southern Sudan or northern Uganda have until June 30 to assemble.

¶7. (U) The LRA reportedly ambushed vehicles on the Gulu-Nimule road at the Uganda-Sudan border on April 30. Seven people were killed, several reportedly abducted, and property looted. LRA leaders are playing down the incident. LRA deputy, Vincent Otti, called Radio Mega FM in Gulu and said that LRA members should not attack civilians.

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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY  
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¶8. (U) UNHCR released statistics on population movement in northern Uganda for March. In the Acholi sub-region (Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader districts) only one percent of the population has returned to their villages of origin, far lower than expected. Twenty-four percent are believed to be in decongestion sites or transit camps. Nonetheless, UNHCR estimates that 80 percent of the internally-displaced persons (IDPs) are accessing up to four acres of land.

¶9. (U) In contrast, returns in non-Acholi districts are higher. In Lango District, 76 percent of IDPs have returned to their villages of origin and 24 percent remain in camps. The numbers of IDPs in transit in Lango are negligible. Humanitarian organizations say that those IDPs remaining in camps in Lango are likely to remain permanently in towns and trading centers. Sanitation in remaining camps is deteriorating now that humanitarian organizations are no longer overseeing services or maintaining garbage pits. USAID/OFDA Northern Uganda Advisor states that the transition of the camps could provide an opportunity to increase the capacity of local governments in planning and delivery of services at the sub-county level.

¶10. (U) The GOU and UNDP/Mine Action are addressing complaints raised by de-miners who recently stopped working. Salaries for the de-miners will be increased, district hospitals have agreed to treat injured de-miners and medics will be deployed with each team. The de-miners also want an ambulance deployed with each team and have requested a higher level of training. The training options are being explored in Kenya. The GOU and UNDP/Mine Action report that there are more sites than expected, including large weapons caches that require higher-level explosive ordnance disposal for which the de-miners are not trained.

¶11. (SBU) USG Activities: P/E Chief and Democracy and Governance Advisor attended a briefing in Kampala by John Holmes, the new U.N. Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs on May 16. This was Holmes' first visit to Uganda. He described Ugandan government

officials as skeptical that the Juba peace process would yield an agreement. Government officials described the LRA as a spent force and said that if the talks failed, the LRA would not be able to "create chaos" in northern Uganda. President Museveni emphasized the importance of putting "an end to impunity" with regard to the LRA. The Prime Minister's office emphasized the importance of moving from relief to development.

¶12. (SBU) Holmes stated that he wanted to meet with Ugandan Government officials before he made any decisions on how to move forward on the issue of the humanitarian coordinator. He did not anticipate repeating the same process that failed to gain government acceptance of Elizabeth Rassmussen's nomination. The status quo was not acceptable to Holmes either. He anticipated working out a compromise between both positions, and promised to consult widely with the field in making a decision.

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IN THE MEDIA AND THE WEB  
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¶13. (U) During his recent visit to Uganda, Deputy Assistant Secretary Swan participated in an on-the-record roundtable

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discussion on May 8 with journalists from The New Vision, The Daily Monitor, The EastAfrican, The Weekly Observer and Uganda Radio Network. While the journalists were primarily focused on the UPDF's deployment in Somalia, and Ugandan democratization and human rights practices, they also asked about U.S. support for the Juba talks and our position on the ICC indictments of four LRA leaders. Swan replied: "With respect to the negotiations in Juba with the LRA, in general, we very much support the African-led mediation in Juba, which also benefits obviously from the support of former president Chissano and now from the presence of other African observer countries that are represented in Juba. We think that this process needs to go forward and we endorse that process. We also think that it is important that commitments that have been made as part of the process be respected - in this case, notably, the requirement that the LRA proceed to the assembly point at Ri-Kwangba before June 30, so we are very eager to see that happen."

¶14. (U) Swan continued, "With respect to the International Criminal Court (ICC), clearly this is something that is going to have to be worked out between the government of Uganda and the ICC in terms of

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determining a way forward. The U.S. priority in this situation is for peace. We, as you know, are not signatories to the ICC charter - the Rome Charter - but we believe very strongly that there needs to be justice and accountability for those who committed abuses in northern Uganda."

¶15. (U) The full transcript of the press roundtable is available on the U.S. Mission Website (<http://kampala.usembassy.gov>).  
CHRITTON